

University of Wollongong

## Research Online

---

Faculty of Law, Humanities and the Arts -  
Papers

Faculty of Arts, Social Sciences & Humanities

---

1-1-2012

### 'Outsiders and ratbags': the Greens will struggle without Bob Brown

Gregory Melleuish

University of Wollongong, [gmelleui@uow.edu.au](mailto:gmelleui@uow.edu.au)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ro.uow.edu.au/lhapapers>



Part of the [Arts and Humanities Commons](#), and the [Law Commons](#)

---

#### Recommended Citation

Melleuish, Gregory, "Outsiders and ratbags': the Greens will struggle without Bob Brown" (2012). *Faculty of Law, Humanities and the Arts - Papers*. 1536.  
<https://ro.uow.edu.au/lhapapers/1536>

Research Online is the open access institutional repository for the University of Wollongong. For further information contact the UOW Library: [research-pubs@uow.edu.au](mailto:research-pubs@uow.edu.au)

---

## **'Outsiders and ratbags': the Greens will struggle without Bob Brown**

### **Abstract**

The exit of Bob Brown raises an interesting issue for the Australian Greens. Now the party's charismatic founder has gone, what will happen to the party? Does it have a long-term future, and if so, what kind of future?

There has long been a place in Australian politics for one minor party, that acts as a safety valve for those who are not happy with the state of politics. But that party does not have to be the Greens. If political circumstances change and another charismatic figure emerges a new party could well emerge to challenge the Greens for this role.

### **Keywords**

ratbags, greens, will, brown, struggle, outsiders, without, bob

### **Disciplines**

Arts and Humanities | Law

### **Publication Details**

Melleuish, G. (2012). 'Outsiders and ratbags': the Greens will struggle without Bob Brown. The Conversation, (15 April)

15 April 2012, 1.01pm AEST

# **‘Outsiders and ratbags’: the Greens will struggle without Bob Brown**

**Author**

1.



**Gregory Melleuish**

Associate Professor, School of History and Politics at University of Wollongong

## **Disclosure Statement**

Gregory Melleuish does not work for, consult to, own shares in or receive funding from any company or organisation that would benefit from this article, and has no relevant affiliations.

**UNIVERSITY OF  
WOLLONGONG**



Provides funding as a [Member](#) of The Conversation.

[uow.edu.au](http://uow.edu.au)



Bob Brown says The Greens could form a future government, but they may have peaked already. AAP/Lukas Coch

The exit of Bob Brown raises an interesting issue for the Australian Greens. Now the party's charismatic founder has gone, what will happen to the party? Does it have a long-term future, and if so, what kind of future?

There has long been a place in Australian politics for one minor party, that acts as a safety valve for those who are not happy with the state of politics. But that party does not have to be the Greens. If political circumstances change and another charismatic figure emerges a new party could well emerge to challenge the Greens for this role.

## Three party politics

The Democrats became the first of these third parties in 1977. They had their heyday in the early years of the Howard government. For a time, it seemed possible that One Nation would also assume that role. But in past few years this role has been taken over by the Greens.

All of these parties were founded by a charismatic leader – Don Chipp for the Democrats and Pauline Hanson for One Nation – and came to be associated with that leader. This may partially explain why both the Democrats and One Nation are no longer significant political players.

All of these parties share an old-fashioned form of economic nationalism in which the state plays an important role. They have appealed to a particular constituency which feels that the two major parties are not really serving their interests, and that politics has failed them.

One could argue that what caused the emergence of third parties, and has sustained them, was Bob Hawke's post-1983 [economic reform](#), supported by both the major political parties, which sought to make Australia a more competitive and productive country.

Hence the desire, manifested in their economic nationalism, of minor parties to return to the "good old days".

## A limited appeal

The Greens are both the environmental party and the party of the big state and increased government control. This can be seen in many of their policies, for example their [policies on education](#).

Their appeal is necessarily limited because the sort of constituency that they attract are those who do not like politics as practised by the major parties. They are the natural home for outsiders and ratbags. In this sense they are an "anti-political" political party.

This means that their appeal cannot rise much beyond 15% of the electorate. Hence they are very attractive to many young people who have problems with the major parties, and who do not yet feel that they are part of the political system. Green policies on education, that students should pay less and the state pay more, are attractive to this group. The Greens also appeal to academics who also feel somewhat alienated by the political system.

## The end of the Greens?

One thing, I believe, is certain. The Greens will not become a major party unless they cease to be the Greens.

Major parties have to appeal to the broader Australian community and there is no indication that the Greens are capable of evolving in this way. What Bob Brown achieved was to make the Greens the unchallenged third player in Australian politics. It was a considerable achievement.

But they have now reached their peak. My feeling is that the best they can do is to maintain their level of support. However, the case of the Democrats may indicate that once the minor party in Australia peaks, the fact that it cannot go any further may be a sign of its ultimate decay.

Whatever the case there is no doubt that the Greens will miss Bob's charisma.

[Sign in to Favourite 122 Comments](#)

- [Republish](#)
- [Email](#)
- [Tweet](#)5

- [Share](#)1
- [Share](#)0
- [Reddit this!](#)

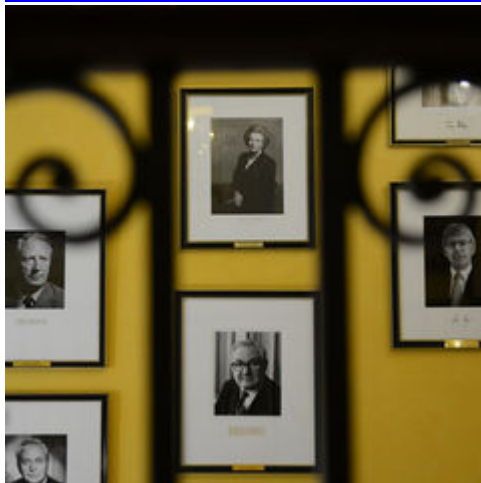
## Tags

[Australian politics](#), [Bob Brown](#), [Greens](#)

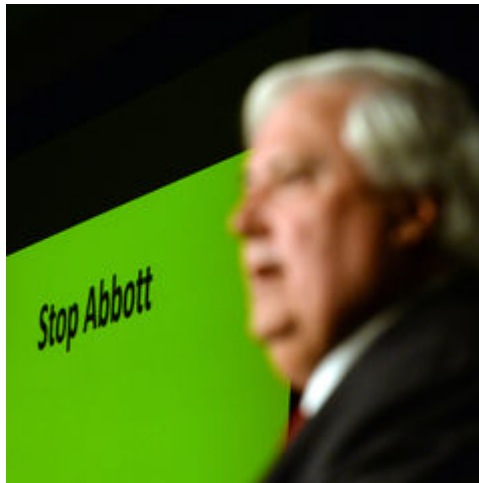
## Related articles



[28 July 2014 Explainer: could federal law end the state bans on euthanasia?](#) [24 June 2014 Greens miss the chance of a victory on fuel policy](#)



[29 May 2014 How the free-market ideology of IEA has](#)



[gained political ground](#)

[20 May 2014 Populist Palmer](#)



[drops his jester act to appeal to middle Australia](#)

[19](#)

[February 2014 What issues will a WA Senate re-vote be fought on?](#)

### **Articles also by This Author**

[15 October 2013 Punching, prodding and blocking: the opposition's changing role in politics](#)

[30 August 2013 Election 2013 Issues: How we make our money](#) [28 May 2012 Modern](#)

[politics is too clever by half ... and we're worse off for it](#) [14 May 2012 'Class warfare' or](#)

[not, Australia has moved on from Labor's old-fashioned rhetoric](#) [8 May 2012 Federal budget](#)

[2012: expert reaction](#)